

## ANALYSING ABLEIST LANGUAGE USE IN IGBO ORAL LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

45 Igbo proverbs, selected through criteria sampling from experiential knowledge, oral interviews and print, were subjected to analysis with the objectives to identify ableist language use in them as well as critically analyse the attitude of the Igbo towards people with disabilities reflected in them. Thematic and sociological approaches were used. 13 categories of Igbo disability proverbs emerged - categories A-M, which covered 13 themes of disability including blindness, deafness, leprosy, hunch, dwarfism, madness etc. The findings showed that majority of the Igbo disability proverbs used were ableist much as a few were non ableist. Among them were found a few animal metaphors. The research established that, generally speaking, the ableist language used in the proverbs equated disability to something negative and undesirable deserving to be discriminated against, marginalized, stigmatized and possibly excluded. One could infer the tendency of the Igbo in real life to treat people with disabilities as requiring fixing and so limited and inferior to able-bodied members of the community. The researchers suggested that the Igbo people's negative attitude to individuals with disabilities should be changed for a positive and healthier one.

**KEYWORDS:** Ableist Language Use, Igbo Oral Literature

### RÉSUMÉ

45 proverbes igbo, dont le sélectionnement était à base critère - la réflexion dans chacun d'eux d'un incapacitisme ou d'un handicap - ont été soumis à l'analyse critique ayant l'objectif d'identifier l'expression d'un langage ableist qui y résidait et de plus l'attitude des Igbo vis-à-vis des handicaps. L'étude a eu à sa disposition les approches thématique et sociologique. Nous avons évolué 13 catégories de proverbes igbo sur le handicap – catégories A-M, qui ont recouvert 13 thèmes sur le handicap y inclus: l'aveuglement, la sourdit , la l prose, la bosse, le nanisme, la folie, etc. Selon les constatations de l' tude, la majorit  des proverbes igbo sur le handicap soumis   notre  tude  tait ableist malgr  qu'il y existait un peu d'eux qui n' tait pas ableist. Un nombre minime de ces proverbes igbo apparaissait sous forme de m taphores animales. Il a  t   tabli que, de mani re g n rale, le langage ableist reflet  dans les proverbes  tudi s qualifiait le handicap d'une chose n gative et ind sirable m ritant donc la discrimination, la marginalization, la stigmatisation, et si possible, l'exclusion. On pourrait insinuer la tendance chez les Igbo, dans la vie r elle,   traiter les handicaps comme des individus ayant besoin de fixing, et donc sont limit s et inf rieurs aux membres sains de la communaut . Les chercheurs ont sugg r  que les Igbo changent leur attitude n gative vis   vis des handicaps.

**MOTS-CL S:** Usage Du Langage Ableist, Litt rature Orale Igbo

## INTRODUCTION

About 1 billion people in the world (i.e., 15% of the global population) have one type of documented disability or the other. That notwithstanding, people with disabilities suffer from widespread discrimination at almost every level of society (<https://www.bbc.com>). The phenomenon of able-bodied members of the society meting out prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination to people with disabilities based on the assumption that the latter require fixing and so are defined by their disabilities and excluded, is of recent described as ableism (Onyemelukwe, 2001:2). The concept of ableism, also known as ableism, disableism (Brit. English) anapiraphobia, anapirism and disability discrimination, is simply defined by *Urban Dictionary* as the discrimination or prejudice against people with disability. It maintains that ableism can appear in diverse forms such as ideas and assumptions, stereotypes, attitude and practices, physical barriers in the environment, or larger scale oppression. Take, for example, developing countries such as Nigeria do not, as at the moment, consider the peculiar interests of people with disability in their construction of roads, architectural buildings, for instance, unlike developed countries where special passageways are created on certain roads for disabled people and buildings have special restrooms for them.

Andrew Pulrang-Forbes opines that ableism can also refer to any statement or behaviour directed at a disabled person which goes to denigrate or assume a lesser status for the person as a result of his/her disability (<http://www.forbes.com>). The researchers of the present article posit that the statement or behaviour may not necessarily be directed at the person with disability, as reflected in Pulrang-Forbes' definition of ableism, and still it will have a disastrous impact on such a person as will be divulged later in this study. Pulrang-Forbes' definition of ableism is found very apt for the present research topic: "Analysing Ableist Language Use in Igbo Oral Literature".

It is important to note that even though ableism features prominently in disability studies in American, English Literatures for example, and is being explored by activists and artists, as well as other disciplines, like sociology, education, anthropology, history, medicine and law, it is quite novel in French and Francophone Literatures talk less of Igbo Literature. However, the Igbo people are currently being sensitized over the radio and television against this phenomenon of discrimination against people with disabilities by able-bodied members of the society. The fact that they are generally no longer referred to as *ndị ọlụsị* (i.e., the handicapped ones) but as *ndị nwelu nkwalụ arụ* (people with disability) attest to it. One wonders what happens with the sayings, idiomatic expressions and proverbs of the Igbo language which probably have remained ableist. Consider these idiomatic expressions:

Iwe iwe akakpo (Getting Angry like a dwarf)

Ọkụ anwuru onye eze nkwo (The ashtray of the toothless person)

Dwarfism and toothlessness are both forms of *nkwalụ arụ*, i.e., disability. In the first instance, short temper is said to be the character trait of a dwarf while in the second example, the ash tray of the toothless person is presented as an eyesore and these statements denigrate the dwarf and the toothless person. Such a person is held up in derision.

The present research focuses on Igbo proverbs. Proverbs constitute one of the genres of Igbo Oral Literature. Cognizant of the fact that as a character in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) reiterates: The Igbo people love using proverbs to express themselves and to them, the proverb is like palm oil with which words are eaten (Achebe, 1958:5), the Igbo's attitude to people with disabilities is likely to be engrained in their proverbs used for interpersonal

communication. This is what motivated the present study.

Criterion sampling was used to select 45 Igbo proverbs on the basis of each containing one form of disability or the other. Thematic and sociological approaches were used to analyse ableism in the selected proverbs. The identified disabilities constitute the themes for study. The sociological approach enables us study the attitude of the Igbo to the identified forms of disability given that literature is a reflection of social realities. Thus the two methods are found very appropriate in carrying out the present study. The objectives of this study are: to identify ableist character of the proverbs and analyse the attitude of the Igbo towards people with disabilities reflected in the proverbs under study.

The key terms were defined and explained and the proverbs were analysed. They were first categorized according to the disability identified in each one before analysis, discussions and conclusions.

## **KEY TERMS: DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION**

### **Ableist Language Use**

Ableist language use refers to the use of statements, utterances, renditions, sayings, expressions whether idiomatic or proverbial which are centered on one form of disability or the other tending to denigrate or reduce the status of the disabled individual thereby portraying him or her as inferior to able-bodied members of the society. This definition tallies with Pulrang-Forbes' view of the concept of ableism earlier stated in this work: any statement or behaviour directed at disabled person which goes to denigrate or assume a lesser status for the person as a result of his or her disability (<https://www.forbes.com>). It is necessary to reiterate our earlier argument which states categorically that contrary to Pulrang-Forbes' position, the ableist language proffered may not necessarily be directed at a disabled person. Nevertheless, whether it be directed or not at a disabled person, the truth remains that people who make use of ableist language may end up hurting certain social categories (people with disabilities) without knowing they are doing so.

Needless to add that, sometimes, the ableist language is directed at the person/persons with disability/disabilities just to hurt them, to make a mockery of them or to hold them up in derision or even to thingify them and remind them of their inferior status vis-à-vis the able-bodied members of the society. There is no denying the fact that ableist language is omnipresent in day-to-day conversations of different communities among different ethnic groups or human races. Take, for example, the English utter such ableist language as; turning a "blind eye" to a problem, making a "dumb choice", falling on "deaf ears", having a bipolar day and "acting crazy". Among the French one can come across ableist language use like: faire "la sourde oreille", un raisonnement boiteux; paix boiteuse; être muet comme la tombe et myope comme une taupe. Is ableist language use also a common feature in the oral expression of people of Igbo extraction in the South East of Nigeria? The present study hopes to find answers to this and similar questions.

Ableism can be classified into personal ableism and systemic ableism. Personal ableism has to do with name calling or committing of violence against a person with disability. On the other hand, systemic ableism refers to the inequality experienced by disabled people at the hands of laws and policy. Ableism can also be classified as direct or indirect ableism. Finally, ableism can be intentional or unintentional appearing, in forms of linguistic micro-aggressions as the just cited examples (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article>).

## IGBO ORAL LITERATURE

Nigerian Literature which comprises Nigerian Oral Literature and Nigerian Written Literature is a very rich literature with an excellent aesthetic beauty (Onyemelukwe, 2018: 9). It is, in the words of Daniel Vignal, “la plus riche d’Afrique noire” (mongobeti. arts.uwa.edu.au/issues/pnpa33). This is attested to by its plethora of literary icons of international repute; such writers as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Flora Nwapa. Zainab Alkali, Akachi Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Ngozi, Adichie.

Igbo Oral Literature is part and parcel of Nigerian Oral Literature which belongs to African Oral Literature like numerous other literatures of the diversity of ethnic groups that make up the continent of Africa. African Oral Literature of which the real griot (griotte) is its depository and original source in the pre-colonial era (Onyemelukwe, 2004:67), is defined as:

Une littérature qui se constitue d’une gamme de genres diversifiés notamment les contes, les poèmes, les énigmes ou les devinettes, les plaisanteries, les chants, les proverbes, les fables, les mythes et les légendes qui sont transmis de bouche à oreille d’une génération à une autre par le biais des langues autochtones du peuple africain, de la langue de l’environnement immédiat (telle que le haoussa à Zaria) et de la langue officielle du pays (par exemple, l’anglais au Nigeria ou le français au Niger), qui étaient autrefois purement orales mais ont fini par être transcrites, traduites et mises à l’écrit et qui se livrent aujourd’hui aussi à la voie de transmission scientifique et technologique comme la radio, la télévision, Internet et les médias sociaux - Youtube Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger ainsi de suite (Onyemelukwe, 2014:68-69).

This definition points out clearly that the proverb is one of the numerous genres or resources of African Oral Literature affirming earlier positions of Blair, 1976:24 & Chevrier, 2004:194). It goes without saying that the proverb is one of the genres of Igbo Oral Literature. In short, Ifeoma Onyemelukwe, who has done extensive and intensive studies on Igbo proverbs categorizes the proverbs as Igbo Oral Literature IV having classed lullabies, songs and games and riddles as Igbo Oral Literature, I, II and III respectively. She translated those works herself from Igbo to English and to French. The auto translations into French appear in her work titled: *La littérature orale en Afrique et surtout chez les Igbo* (Onyemelukwe, 2014:119-158).

Definitions of proverb abound in print. François Ugochukwu defines the proverb as: “des vérités validées par l’expérience ancestrale, testée et éprouvée par le temps, une forme de langage ... s’appuyant sur des métaphores empruntées à l’expérience de la vie quotidienne... une formule créatrice unique” (2004:88). Ugochukwu’s emphasis, in this definition, is on genesis of proverbs. Obiefuna, for his part, defines proverb as “the distilled wisdom of the ancestors” (1978:13); still hammering on its origin, whereas the guru of African Oral Literature Ruth Finegan while defining the proverb places emphasis on its characteristics:

A saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the acceptance of truth tersely expressed in it (1970:389).

Chukwuma, in her *Igbo Oral Literature Theory and Tradition*, defines the proverb in a somewhat similar way as Ugochukwu: the proverb is a truth validated by ancestral experience tested and proven with time (1994:27). The definitions cited here boil down to the fact that the proverb is a concise expression of a truth tested and validated in light of experiences that ancestors have had over the years in a language community.

## THE CORPUS

Table 1 displays the categorization of 45 Igbo proverbs selected through criterion sampling. By this, each selected proverb contained one form of disability or the other. The Proverbs were drawn from various sources, including experiential knowledge, oral interviews and print. For the oral sources, I wish to appreciate my friend, Chief (Mrs.) Ngozi Nzelibe of the Ahmadu Bello University staff school, Zaria; my wise maternal cousin lady Ifeatu Nnebe and the wife of my late paternal cousin, Prof. Lawrence Nwakalor, Mrs. Obianuju Nkemdilig Esther Larry- Nwakalor, Assistant Manager Programs Head Igbo language programs, Nigeria Television Authority, Languages, T.V. House, NTA Headquarters, Area II, Garki, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory.

**Table 1: Categorization of Igbo Disability Proverbs**

S/N	Category	English Translation	A/NA
A	Animal Metaphors		
A1	Ukpana okpoko gburu nti chiri ya.	The grasshopper killed by the hornbill is hard of hearing.	A
A2	Ijiji nti chiri na-eso ozu ala n'ili.	The deaf fly follows the corpse to the grave.	A
A3	Okukọ na-echi nti na-anụ ihe n'ite ofe.	The deaf fowl hears once in a pot of soup.	A
A4	Agadi nwaanyị na-ere ogiri maara ijiji anya kporo.	The old woman who sells ogiri knows the fly that is blind.	A
A5	Mgbada dara ibi bu uru dinta.	The deer with enlarged prostate is the hunter's gain.	A
A6	Ọ na-abụ nkita gboba onye nwe ya, ọ bughị ara, ọ buru na onwu na-agu ya.	When the dog barks at its owner, either it is mad or it wants to die.	A
A7	A naghị elesi onye ulo okukọ ukwu jiri.	A fowl with a broken leg is not sold to a kinsman.	A
A8	Ehi na-enweghi odu chi ya na-achuru ya ijiji.	The chi of the cow without a tail wards off flies for it.	NA
A9	Ukwu jie agu, nwa mgbada a wuliba osọ.	If the leopard's leg is broken, the baby deer hops on.	A
B	Blindness (isi)		
B10	Isi kpudolu orja niile.	Blindness is the worst of all diseases.	A
B11	Onye isi lachacha udala o zotalun'ukwu, ya je tuta ozọ.	After the blind person has eaten the African apple matched on, let him/her go get another one.	A
B12	Onye isi a naghị ebu mgwulo.	The blind does not carry the cripple.	A
B13	Ihere mere nwanne onye isi ka o bjara ibiri utara biri ya n'ala.	As the blind man wanted to take a ball of fufu, he took it from the ground to the shame of his relation.	A
B14	Otu mkpuru akwu onye isi na-efu n'oku.	One and only one palmtree of the blind that is lost in the fire.	A
B15	Otu mkpuru anya onye isi ji ahụ ụzọ.	One singular eye with which the blind sees.	A
B16	Onye isi a maghị na chi e jie.	The blind does not know night has fallen.	A
B17	A si na-aghu anya mkpo ma o buru na e tinyeghi n'ala.	Man cannot boast of not being blind as long as he is not yet in the grave.	NA
B18	I na-ekpe ikpe onye isi.	You are judging like the blind	A
B19	Ka I kpulu isi, I na-echi nti.	As you are blind, are you also deaf?	A
C	Deafness (Ichinti)		
C20	A na-akoro ochi nti na agha esu?	Does the deaf need to be told that war has started?	NA
C21	Onye na-arịo nwaanyị ochi nti ihe, ya luo ya aka.	He who is begging a deaf woman for something should point at it.	A
C22	Ka I na-echi nti, I na-echi anya	As you are hard of hearing, are you also hard of seeing.	A
D	The Lamé (Ngwulo)		
D23	Ngwulo a maghị ufu ije.	The lame does not know the pain in walking.	A
D24	Osọ su nwa ngwulo e bulu ụzọ.	When the need to run arises, the cripple takes off first.	A
D25	Agha a kara aka a naghị eri nwa ngwulo.	The cripple does not lose his life in a well-planned war.	A

Table 1: Contd.,

D26	Ọnwa tibe ije a gụba nwa ngwụlọ.	When the moon is shining, the cripple longs to go on a walk.	A
D27	Mmiri ga-eru nwa ngwụlọ ebe oruru ibe ya.	The water will reach the cripple where it reaches others.	A
E	Leprosy (Nchiche or Ekpenta)		
E28	E ji nchiche a ma atọrja?	Can any disease be likened to leprosy.	A
E29	E kwe onye nchiche n'aka, ibi ọma a gụba ya.	When a leper gets a handshake, he craves for an embrace.	A
F	Hunch (Mkpumpku)		
F30	E ji mkpumpku a ma atọrja?	Can any disease be likened to a hunch?	A
F31	Onye mụtalu nwa mkpumpku mara ka o si akwọ ya n'azụ.	She who gave birth to a hunch back child knows how to carry it at her back.	A
G	Dwarfism (Akakpo/Akanri)		
G32	Akakpo e meghe ihe o jiri buru nwoke, ụmụ nna ya a gaghị ekwe na-o tolugo ilu nwaanyị	If the dwarf does not impregnate a woman, his kinsmen will not agree that he has reached the age of marriage.	A
H	Protruding Buttocks (Ukwu ike)		
H33	Nwaanyị ukwu ike a maghị ihe chi ya mere ya rue mgbe ihe oso mere.	The woman with protruding buttocks does not know her ill fate till there is a reason for people to run.	A
I	Enlarged Prostate (Ibi)		
I34	Ibi karja ngada, a kwaalu ya akpa.	When the enlarged prostate grows exceedingly large, a sack is made for it.	A
I35	Onye amụ ya di mma, a maghị ihe onye ibi na-ahụ.	He whose penis is normal does not know what a person with enlarged prostate suffers.	A
J	Lumbar Spondylosis (Ukwu iwa awa)		
J36	Kedu ka esi ga-akwọ onye ukwu wara..	How can the person with lumbar spondylosis be carried	A
J37	Nwaanyị ukwu wara maara ka ya na di ya si e dīna.	A woman with lumbar spondylosis knows how she sleeps with her husband.	A
J38	Ukwu waa, ọ buru mgboko	When one's hips get broken, one is exposed to ridicule	A
K	Protruding Stomach (Afo ukwu)		
K39	Nkita sirina ihe ya ji e so onye afọ ukwu bu na ọ nyughị anyu ọ gbọ agbọ.	The dog says that the reason for which it follows one with a protruding stomach is that he either excretes or throws up.	NA
L	Toothless Person (Onye eze nkwo)		
L40	Ọkụ anwuru onye eze nkwo.	The ash tray of a toothless person.	A
M	Madness (Ara)		
M41	A si na anoro n'uzo turu ime, a mutaghi onye ara, a muta onye agwu.	It is said that getting impregnated carelessly leads to giving birth to either a mad person or a possessed person.	A
M42	Onye ara siri na ebe ya na-eje bara uba tinyere egwu ya ga-agba n'uzo.	The mad person says he has uncountable places to go to, not counting the dances he will dance along the way.	A
M43	Onye ara siri na ya a gaghị aju onye ji mma e so ya n'azụ rue mgbe ya choro isi ya achọ.	The mad person says that he will not ask for who is following him with a cutlass until he looks for his head.	A
M44	E yibe onye ara mmnwu, ọ piagbuo ndi mmadu.	If a mad man is dressed as a masquerade, he will flog okro seeds out of people's eyes	A
M45	Onye ara di mma nlele n'ahia, ma kedu onye ọ ga-abu nke ya?	It is interesting to watch a mad person in the market, but who would want such to be his/her own.	A

Key

SN- Serial number

A- Ableist

NA- Not Ableist

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

As clearly shown on Table 1: Categorization of Igbo Disability Proverbs, the researchers arrive at thirteen categories of Igbo disability proverbs, categories A-M ranging as follows:

- Category A comprising 9 proverbs which are animal metaphors (A1-A9)
- Category B comprising 10 proverbs on blindness (Isi) (B10-B19)
- Category C comprising 3 proverbs on deafness (Ichi nti) (C20-C22)
- Category D comprising 5 proverbs on the cripple (Ngwulo) (D23-D27)
- Category E comprising 2 proverbs on leprosy (Nchiche or Ekpenta) (E28-E29)
- Category F comprising 2 proverbs on hunch (Mkpumkpu) (F30-F31)
- Category G comprising 1 proverb on dwarfism (Akakpo/Akanri) (G32)
- Category H comprising 1 proverb on protruding buttocks (Ukwu Ike) (H33)
- Category I comprising 2 proverbs on enlarged prostate (Ibi) (I34-I35)
- Category J comprising 3 proverbs on lumbar spondylosis (Ukwu iwa awa) (J36-J38)
- Category K comprising 1 proverb on protruding stomach (Afo ukwu) (K39)
- Category L comprising 1 proverb on toothless person (Onye eze nkwo) (L40)
- Category M comprising 5 proverbs on madness (Ara) (M41-M45)

In a nutshell, 13 different kinds of disabilities are reflected in the selected Igbo proverbs, viz.: blindness, deafness, lameness, leprosy, hunch, dwarfism, protruding buttocks, enlarged prostate, lumbar spondylosis, protruding stomach, toothless jaw, madness and missing tail. Missing tail appears in one of the animal metaphorical proverbial expressions, the very first category. The animal metaphors cover also other disabilities like deafness (3), blindness (1), enlarged prostate (1), madness (1) and lameness (2).

Our research cannot claim to have exhausted all the Igbo Proverbs featuring disabilities nor can it lay claim to having exhausted all existing disabilities among the Igbo. Of the 45 Igbo disability proverbs selected for this study, 40 (89%) are found to be ableist while only 5 (11%) are not ableist. It goes without saying that the Igbo who are adept in the use of proverbs in their day-to-day communication are prone to ableist language used in oral literature given that majority of Igbo disability proverbs used in the present study are found to be ableist.

9 (i.e., 20%) of the selected proverbs are animal metaphors. It would seem that ndigbo love using animals with disabilities to represent human beings in these proverbs for giving advice, counsel, caution, etc. For example: “Ukpana okpoko gburu nti chiri ya”. (The grasshopper killed by the hornbill is hard of hearing). The bird hornbill makes a lot of noise as it flies. This implies that the victim of a misfortune has been duly warned and advised to desist from the wrong doing, but he/she refuses to oblige despite repeated warnings. And so he/she meets the doom. When an elder proffers this proverb to a sensible person, he retraces his steps except he is hard of hearing. Likening such a person to the deaf is

problematic and ableist because it encourages the culture of stigmatization, separation, marginalization and exclusion among the Igbo. It gives the impression that deaf people are inherently stubborn which is not correct. This attitude exhibited by the Igbo is not quite correct and needs to be changed.

Consider A5; “Mgbada dara ibi bu uru dinta” (The deer with enlarged prostate is the hunter’s gain). This proverb, even though it reflects disability - enlarged prostate, is not ableist because it is uttered to express that it is to the advantage of the hunter who will cut off the “ibi” for his personal consumption while he sells the rest of the animal.

“Onye isi a maghi na chi e jie” (The blind does not know night has fallen) is ableist and does not communicate the total truth. Some blind people are more insightful than those that see. They have ways of knowing the times and the seasons. This ableist proverb used by the Igbo tends to portray the blind as limited, incapacitated and trapped, needed fixing so to be able to know the times like those without visual disability. On the other hand, “A si na-aghu anya mkpo ma o buru na e tinyeghi n’ala” (Man cannot boast of not being blind as long as he is not yet in the grave), is not ableist but simply expresses a simple truth about tomorrow’s uncertainty.

“Onye na-ario nwaanyi ochi nti ihe, ya luo ya aka” (He who is begging a deaf woman for something should point at it) is yet another ableist Igbo proverb which is meant to show case the disabled woman's limitation, her inability to hear, hence the need to point at the object in question. Should her disability be hammered? This ableist language defines marginalization and exclusion just as “Onwa tibe ije guba nwa ngwulo (When the moon shines, the cripple longs to go on a walk) and “E kwe onye nchiche n’aka, ibi oma a guba ya” (When a leper gets a handshake he craves for an embrace). This ableist proverb used by the Igbo encourages the culture of stigmatization and exclusion. One can infer here that the Igbo have the culture of separation/ exclusion of these persons with disabilities. In real life situation, the lepers are excluded.

This attitude needs a change.

Finally, the following Igbo proverbs call for stigmatization and discrimination against mentally disabled persons. “Onye ara siri na ya a gaghiaju onye ji mma e so ya n’azu rue mgbe ya chorosi ya achosi” (The mad person says that he will not ask for who is following him with a cutlass until he looks for his head). This proverbial expression is incoherent and illogical. By the time the madman's head is off, how on earth, will he be able to ask for who has been following him with a cutlass? From the land of the dead? Such a mentally disabled person as portrayed by the proverb in the eyes of the Igbo, is to be stigmatized, marginalized and excluded. “E yibe onye ara mmowu, o piagbuo ndi mmadu” (If a mad man is dressed as a masquerade, he will flog okro seeds out of people's eyes), as far as the Igbo are concerned, calls indeed for such mad person to be discriminated against and to be excluded from participation in the masquerade cult.

The findings of this study showed that some of the ableist Igbo proverbs fall into personal ableism meaning that by using such personal ableist proverbs, one is committing violence against the person with disability eg., “E ji nchiche a ma atu oria (Can any disease be likened to leprosy?), “E ji nkumpku a ma atu oria” (Can any disease be likened to a hunch?), Ka I kpulu isi, I na echi nti? (As you are blind, are you also deaf?). “Ka i na- echi nti, i na-echi anya?”(As you are hard of hearing are you also hard of seeing?) These can also be rated direct ableist language use.

However, according to our findings a large number of the Igbo disability proverbs subjected to our analysis are ableist in an indirect and even unintentional way. They appear in form of linguistic micro-aggressions, e.g., “Onye isi a maghi ebu mgwulo” (The blind does not carry the cripple); “Mgwulo a maghi ufu ije” (The lame does not know the pain in walking);



“Ibi karja ngada a kwaalu ya akpa” (When the enlarged prostate grows exceedingly large, a sack is made for it); “Oku anwuru onye eze nkwo” (the ashtray of a toothless person); “Nwaanyi ukwu wara mara ka ya na di ya si e dīna”. (A woman with lumbar spondylosis knows how she sleeps with her husband).

## CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this study were to identify ableist language use in Igbo Oral Literature specifically proverbs and to critically analyse the attitude of the Igbo towards people with disabilities reflected in the proverbs under study. 45 Igbo proverbs drawn from experiential knowledge, oral interviews and print were selected through criterion sampling, each proverb containing a form of disability. Thematic and sociological approaches were used to conduct the research. 13 categories of Igbo disability proverbs emerged – Categories A-M - covering the following themes of disability – blindness, deafness, cripple, leprosy, hunch, dwarfism, protruding buttocks, enlarged prostate, lumbar spondylosis, protruding stomach, toothless jaw bone, madness and missing tail. Missing tail appeared in A8, one of the animal metaphorical proverbial expressions, the very first category.

The research could not claim to have exhausted all Igbo proverbs featuring disabilities or all existing disabilities among the Igbo. The findings of this study showed that majority of the Igbo disability proverbs used were ableist. It was found that the Igbo also use animal metaphorical proverbs which are predominantly ableist.

Whether in using animals with disability to represent humans or reflecting disability in humans themselves, the research established that the Igbo people’s attitude to people with disabilities whether visual, physical, mental disabilities etc. was, without any doubt, ableist even though a few of the proverbs were found to be non ableist. It was also established that the ableist language use as reflected in the Igbo proverbs subjected to our analysis equates disability to something negative and undesirable, something to be discriminated against, marginalized, stigmatized and possibly excluded. This was problematic because it did not quite give the correct picture of what each disability was. One could infer the tendency for the Igbo, in real life, to treat people with disability as requiring fixing and so limited and inferior to able-bodied members of the community.

We recommend a change of attitude of the Igbo to persons with disability. The study found that some ableist language used in the selected Igbo proverbs were out rightly violence committed against the disabled individual what was described as personal ableism; whereas others were indirect even unintentional, appearing as linguistic micro-aggressions. In the present 21st Century digital world where all hands are on deck to promote equality and inclusiveness in all spheres of life for all people, we strongly recommend the disuse of some of the ableist Igbo proverbs eg., E ji nchiche a ma atū orja cognizant of the fact that today leprosy has a cure unlike in those olden days. Also the Igbo people's negative attitude to people with disabilities should be changed for a positive one.

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